

genderbent (mileven week) by urdearestmom

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"I'm just saying! What's Jo E supposed to touch when there's nothing there?"

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i went to work with my mom today that's why this is later than my others have been but,,

yall,, this was so much fun,,,,,, i hope you guys like it as much as i do :)

Maribel Wheeler woke up feeling like shit on Monday. She had a feeling that this week was going to be bad. She could feel herself getting a cold, and she knew her period was coming in the next few days or so. She wasn't looking forward to it.

She dragged herself out of bed, groaning all the way through breakfast and all the way to school and all the way through homeroom. First period marched on, mind-numbing as usual, then second, then third and fourth. After fourth, Maribel made her way to the cafeteria for lunch.

She sank onto the plastic bench and lay on the table, feeling like she was melting into it. She was so *tired*. She didn't perk up at all when she heard her friends sitting down around her.

"What's wrong with you?" Came the voice of Darla.

Maribel groaned against the tabletop. "I feel like *shit*."

"Did you have your period yet?" Asked Lucy.

"Lucy, for God's sake. Not everything is about my period. But no. It's coming."

"It's probably that."

Maribel groaned again before lifting her head, her dark, wavy hair flowing loose down her back. Her friends Darla and Lucy were casually eating their lunches while the last of their group, Willa, reached out to wrap an arm around her shoulders.

"Don't worry about it, Mari. You'll feel better soon," she said

reassuringly.

Willa was wrong. Tuesday didn't fare much better, with Darla choosing to laugh at the fact that Maribel could barely fit into a B cup.

("My tits are perfectly fine, Darla! Just because I'm skinny-"

"I'm just saying! What's Jo E supposed to touch when there's nothing there?"

This was a point of contention because Maribel *insisted* that her crush would like her for who she was and not her body. Lucy was skeptical of anything happening at all, ever, while Willa was supportive. Darla, on the other hand, thought that Maribel's crush on their school's resident weirdo was bound to go down in flames, and she was going to be there to watch (with popcorn).

Maribel personally thought that Darla was just jealous that double Ds meant more expensive bras than Bs.

Wednesday rolled in and out much the same, only Maribel could feel the cold really coming in. Her throat was starting to go sore and her nose was runny, and to top it all off she saw John Elliot in the hallway and he *spoke* to her. Granted, all he said was hi, but Maribel was absolutely disgusted that of all days it had to be the one where she felt like she was about to cough up phlegm if she opened her mouth.

Thursday was the worst day of the week. In the morning, Maribel woke up and felt the telltale slickness between her legs that told her that Satan's Waterfall had begun its monthly visit to her in the middle of the night. This meant she had to rush to get dressed and change her sheets before leaving for school, so she barely had any time for breakfast and went to class with her hair an absolute wreck.

The only thought running through her head all day was *please God can I just go home*. That is, until fifth period, when her only thought was *PLEASE GOD CAN I JUST DIE RIGHT NOW*.

Upon entering geography class, Maribel smiled nervously and waved

a little at John Elliot, who was sitting in his usual seat in the front row, curly hair fluffed up in every direction. The sunlight coming in from the window was bouncing off his face. He looked absolutely *adorable*, as usual, and it made Maribel's heart clench.

She hadn't yet noticed that he wasn't really looking at her, or that the rest of the class was staring at her as if waiting for something. She was too caught up in sighing at how absolutely wonderful John Elliot looked in the light.

But then.

Then she took her seat. And Maribel looked at the chalkboard. And she instantly felt her lunch come up into her throat. On the chalkboard, written in large letters for everyone to read, were the words, MARIBEL W HAS A BIG FAT CRUSH ON JOHN ELLIOT.

It was then that she realized everyone was staring at her, waiting for a reaction, and her lips began to quiver as her vision blurred. She wasn't sure if these were angry or upset tears, but probably a mixture of both. Without a word, Maribel stormed back to the front of the classroom and began erasing the message. She wondered where the hell their teacher was before turning around and surveying her classmates.

"Whichever one of you wrote that is an absolute *asshole*!" She said in a wobbly, teary voice. "You can't just take people's feelings and make them into a joke!" Her voice cracked at the end as she choked on a sob.

Her embarrassment was too great to spare a look at the object of her affections before fleeing the room. Maribel rushed straight into the nearest girls' restroom and locked herself in a stall, dropping down onto the toilet lid and hiding her face in her hands. She hid in the restroom for the whole period, crying her eyes out.

She couldn't believe it. Who would do that? Who would want to hurt her like that? She wasn't exactly well-liked, or anything, but she didn't think she was hated either. Except for by maybe one person who went by the name of Theresa, but Theresa wasn't in that class. At the thought of the class itself, Maribel remembered John Elliot

staring at the board wordlessly. It was like he'd seen a ghost and it broke her heart to think about it. Was the idea of her having a crush on him *that* horrible?

Sixth period, Maribel went to the main office and called home. Her mom didn't answer, so she called her dad at work instead.

"Hello?" He sounded tired. Her dad worked a lot and was unhappy and under-appreciated in his marriage, but he always tried his best to be there for his kids. The same couldn't be said for his wife.

"Hi, dad." Maribel's voice went over the line wavery and she knew her dad would pick up on it.

"What's wrong, honey?"

She swallowed. "I'm not feeling well. Can I go home early?"

Her dad sighed. "Sure. Be careful on your way. I'll see you later, okay?"

"Okay. Thanks, dad."

"Feel better, alright? Do you need me to pick anything up?"

"No, I just need to go home."

"Okay. Well, I'll see you later, then."

"Bye."

She went home and straight to bed, lights out until the next day. She didn't even wake up for dinner. But when she woke up Friday morning with an ache in her bones that made it pretty obvious she'd caught some type of flu, she was glad for an excuse to stay home. Going to school only to face ridicule and rejection would just be too much.

Maribel's mother left her pretty much alone, only bringing her a bowl of chicken soup at noon but otherwise spending the day watching TV. Maribel stayed holed up in her room all day, wallowing and using up all the tissues in the box. She did some homework for a while, but

then she went back to bed and lay there thinking about what she was going to do when she went back to school on Monday.

God, she was going to have to talk to John Elliot, wasn't she? She really didn't want to. Maybe if she just avoided him and pretended everything was fine then she wouldn't have to. Maybe it'd even help her get over him!

Oh, who was she kidding...

It had all started in freshman year. Maribel had dropped a pile of books she'd been putting back on the shelf in the library because the new kid, John Elliot Hopper, had appeared silently out of nowhere and scared her. He'd quietly asked her where to find the sci-fi section, nervously pulling on the curls by his ears, his honey eyes melting right into Maribel's heart. From then on, she had been a total goner. Any time she saw him in the hall or in class, her heart beat faster and her palms got sweaty. She was probably really obvious with all her staring; her friends didn't call her Maribel "Heart Eyes" Wheeler for no reason. She spoke to him sometimes, if he was in the library at the same time as her, and that was when she came up with the nickname Jo E. It's pronounced the same as the name Joey, just spelled Jo E because it's short for John Elliot. He smiled every time she said it.

In sophomore year, they did a project together, and it was absolute heaven to have a reason to spend so much time around him. It was during this time, as they hung out a little more, that he came up with his own nickname for her. He started calling her Bel, which was refreshing since everyone else always called her Mari. Maribel just about went into cardiac arrest after the first time he called her that and every time after. They got a really good grade too, so it was just excellent all around. Maribel also met John Elliot's only friend, a redheaded, freckle-faced skater boy by the name of Max. Max had been the new kid in eighth grade, but everyone had quickly forgotten about him when he didn't prove himself to be super weird. Not like John Elliot.

John Elliot was considered a weirdo because he rarely spoke to anyone besides Max, and if he did it was never outside of school. In fact, it seemed he rarely spoke at all. Lucy and Darla said they'd seen him once at Melvald's and that he'd clearly seen them, but he hadn't

spoken a word; simply waving quickly and disappearing. It was another of the reasons why Maribel was so captivated by him: he was mysterious. She wanted to know more about him. But he was also kindhearted and warm, and just absolutely, positively *adorable*. John Elliot was the cutest boy Maribel had ever laid eyes on.

Her musings were interrupted by a knock on her bedroom door, followed by the entrance of her little brother, Hunter.

"Are you feeling better, Mari?" He asked.

Maribel sniffed loudly and wrapped her comforter tighter around herself. "Not really, Peppermint," she answered. Hunter's nickname was Peppermint because it was his favourite candy all year round, even not at Christmas.

Hunter frowned, his floppy blonde hair bouncing on his head as he walked closer. "But your friends are here."

Maribel coughed. "Tell them that unless they're okay with getting sick too to go home."

Hunter nodded. "Okay." He left the room and a few moments later the door burst open again, revealing a crazed-looking Darla, a sympathetic Willa, and a worried Lucy.

"What happened yesterday? We heard you left during sixth period," said Lucy.

Willa nodded. "People were saying stuff but we wanted to hear it from you."

"Yeah, 'cause half the things people say are bullshit," added Darla.

Maribel blinked a few times, lessening the ache behind her eyes. "Some *asshole* wrote on the board in fifth that I have a crush on Jo E and I ran out," she explained. "And he's in that class. Sits right in the front row and everything," she added in a broken whisper. "He probably hates me right now."

Willa sat down on the edge of Maribel's bed and rubbed a comforting hand over the lump that was her legs. "I'm sure he doesn't. Jo E

doesn't seem like the type to hate someone over something like this."

"Yeah," affirmed Darla, lowering herself to the floor close to Maribel's head with a grunt. "I know *I* make fun of you for liking him, but there's no way *he* would."

Lucy stood between Willa and Darla with her arms crossed. "You have to talk to him. He already knows now, so all you have to do is find out how he feels about it."

Maribel shivered at the idea, but it might've also just been chills from being sick. "Can't I just pretend it never happened?"

Lucy rolled her eyes. "No, because you can't avoid life forever. You would've had to deal with it at some point."

"I hate boys," Maribel protested, sliding her comforter over her head. "I never want to see one again."

"Mari, you have two brothers."

"Not what I meant!"

She couldn't see Darla, but Maribel knew she'd just thrown her hands up in exasperation. "Not what you said two days ago either when you were gushing about Jo E saying hi to you in the hall. You're being a little bitch."

"That's harsh, D," came Willa's soft voice. "Mari's hurting, what they did to her sucks."

"Thanks, Willa."

"But I do think you should talk to him," Willa continued.

Maribel groaned. "Traitors, the three of you."

"We're not traitors," interjected Lucy. "Mari, you gotta look at me."

Reluctantly, Maribel removed the comforter from her head. Lucy was looking at her with a stoic expression, but Maribel could see a smile tugging on the corners of her friend's lips.

"Listen," Lucy said seriously, "I know I was the skeptical one, but John Elliot himself cornered me in last period today to ask me to tell you that he wants to talk to you. He wasn't mad, he was just worried since you didn't come to school. So talk to him."

Shortly afterwards, her friends all had to go home, none of them wanting to stay in Maribel's presence long enough to catch the flu themselves anyway. Over the weekend, she pondered. She mostly lay in bed, but spent some time catching up on the homework her friends had brought her.

Monday morning dawned slightly less shitty than the last one, but Maribel's heart was in her throat. She'd made up her mind to have a talk with John Elliot after all; to make her feelings clear. She put on her favourite striped sweater for a confidence boost and paired it with a random pair of pants she found on her floor. She brushed through her hair once, then looked in the mirror and got angry at a stupid piece that was sticking up in the back. Why couldn't her hair just lie flat for once? She wanted to look *perfect*.

In the end, her hair refused to do what she wanted and she gave up. John Elliot was just going to have to deal with it. At lunch, Darla made Maribel run through every possible variation of a conversation that she could come up with until Maribel got sick of it and started ignoring her. Fifth period rolled around and Maribel walked into her classroom full of trepidation. John Elliot wasn't there yet, but she was sure he would be.

He appeared not a minute later, taking his seat a few desks in front and to the right of her, and Maribel thought he wasn't going to acknowledge her. But then he turned around.

"Can we talk after school?" He asked.

Maribel gulped. She was hoping it could've been quick enough to speak after class. "Um-" Her eyebrows pulled together. "Okay. Bike rack?"

Jo E smiled and Maribel's heart pounded against her ribs so hard she thought it was going to jump right out.

The rest of the day passed in a blur of anticipation. Maribel almost smacked her head against her locker shelf in her haste to grab all her things and get outside. Willa was already standing by the bike rack when she got there, so Maribel sent her inside with word to Darla and Lucy.

A few minutes later, Maribel was still standing alone by her bike, awkwardly picking at the pills on her sweater. Was Jo E even going to show or had she been made a fool once again? She was about to leave when said boy came barrelling out the doors of the school.

"Sorry, Bel!" He called. "Max held me up."

His curls were especially glorious today and Maribel wanted nothing more than to stick her hands in and run her fingers through them. But she held herself back.

"Hi," she responded shyly.

Jo E smiled at her again and Maribel thought she was going to explode.

"So, um... about last week..."

Maribel sighed. "I probably shouldn't have yelled in class like I did," she admitted, gaze drifting somewhere between his dirty Chucks and hers. "I just... didn't want you to find out like that. I wanted to tell you myself."

John Elliot shook his head. "Whoever did that has issues."

While Maribel was glad that he wasn't mad at her and didn't seem disgusted by the fact that she liked him, she also wanted Jo E to get to the point and tell her how he felt. "So..." She dragged the toe of her sneaker across the pavement. "What do you, um... think about it?"

She almost didn't look at him, but she was glad she did. John Elliot's eyes were shining with an emotion she couldn't place, warming her right up to the tips of her fingers and toes. The traces of her flu? Vanished.

"Would you mind if I showed you?" Jo E asked softly.

Maribel shook her head, face lighting up bright pink. She watched as his hands rose to her face, one of them reaching for a lock of her hair and tucking it behind her ear. For a second, it was as if time had stopped as they stared into each other's eyes, but then John Elliot's face got too close to hers for Maribel to see him without crossing her eyes, so she closed them. And then...

His lips were soft but insistent, pressing against hers in the most wonderful way. Maribel got chills again. She never expected kissing to feel so *good*.

She didn't know how long they were kissing for, a year could have passed for all she cared, but when Jo E pulled away from her she felt that all was right with the world.

"I have a big fat crush on you too, Maribel W," he said. "I hope it's obvious now."

Maribel grinned. "Lucy and Darla are never going to believe this."

"What?"